

PART VI

LIVESTOCK, DAIRYING AND POULTRY

General Importance

Since the earliest farm settlements, livestock and their products have played an important part of Skagit County's agricultural economy. The dairy, beef cattle and poultry industry has developed to where it constitutes the primary farming activity of the county. In the Skagit-Samish Lowlands, many of them diked or drained lands, are located some of the finest dairy and pasture lands of the state.

Census of Agriculture data indicate that in 1959 about 57.8 percent of all farm products sold, in terms of cash returns to Skagit County farmers, were derived from livestock and livestock products. The value of all animals and their products marketed was \$9,167,984. Dairy products alone made up nearly 35 percent of the county's commercial farm sales. Skagit ranked fourth in 1959 among Washington counties in number of milk cows and in value of dairy products sold. In addition, the county's poultry industry ranked seventh in the number of chickens on farms and in the volume of eggs sold.

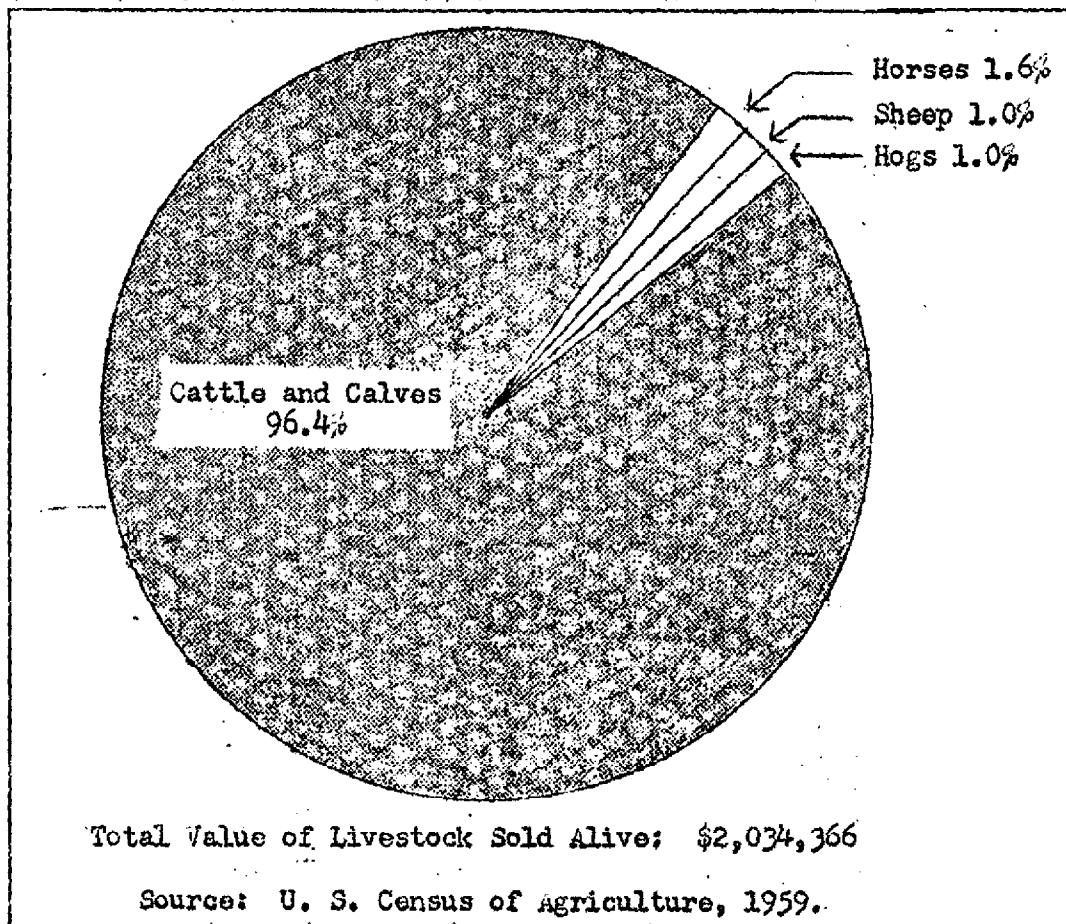


Figure 12. Value of Livestock Sold Alive
Skagit County, 1959

Livestock Trends

Significant changes have occurred in the livestock farming of Skagit County since 1940. The value of livestock and animal products sold increased from \$2,432,068 in 1940 to \$9,167,984 in 1959. There have been net gains in cattle, chickens and sheep from 1940 to 1959 but at the same time hogs, turkeys, horses and mules have dropped in numbers. Changes have also occurred in the county's production of dairy and poultry products. Although the production of whole milk has increased over the years, the amount of cream sold off the farms has been reduced considerably. Egg production, on the other hand, has more than doubled since the late 1940's.

Cattle: Beef and Dairy Farming

Cattle, including both dairy and beef animals, are the most valuable items in Skagit County agriculture. Dairy farms have continued to dominate the livestock enterprise. Dairying is well adapted to the climatic and topographic conditions of the county because dairy cows are efficient users of grass on semi-cropland, hilly slopes and poorly drained lowlands. Both milk and beef cattle numbers have been on an increase in recent years. Improvements in quality and more efficient husbandry practices have been important factors contributing toward this increase.

Table 28. Livestock Numbers on Farms
Skagit County, 1939-1962

Year	January 1 Numbers on Farms		
	All Cattle (head)	Beef Cattle (head)	Dairy Cattle (head)
1939	35,100	4,500	30,600
1940	35,200	5,000	30,200
1941	36,600	5,200	31,400
1942	37,700	5,700	32,000
1943	38,500	4,800	33,700
1944	39,300	5,500	33,800
1945	38,900	5,300	33,600
1946	37,400	6,400	31,000
1947	35,900	6,400	29,500
1948	35,600	6,500	29,100
1949	35,600	8,000	27,600
1950	34,900	7,400	27,500
1951	34,200	7,700	26,500
1952	35,900	9,700	26,200
1953	39,800	12,100	27,700
1954	42,200	12,800	29,400
1955	44,600	14,000	30,600
1956	43,800	11,400	32,400
1957	37,700	6,700	31,000
1958	38,000	7,300	30,700
1959	41,300	10,500	30,800
1960	44,200	11,400	32,800
1961	46,000	12,100	33,900
1962	48,000	13,600	34,400

Source: Statistical Reporting Service, U.S.D.A.

The 1962 number of cattle in Skagit County was nearly double that of 1920. The Census of 1920 enumerated 24,800 head as compared with the estimated figure of 48,000 in 1962. All cattle numbers ranged between 35,000 and 40,000 head during the period from 1939 to 1953 and then reached a high of 44,600 in 1955 only to drop to 37,700 in 1957. The 1940-1955 period was one in which many part-time farmers were fully employed in off-farm work. The labor supply for intensive dairy farming was less during this period. These two factors, in addition to the strong demand for beef during World War II, account for the rise in numbers of all cattle and the expansion of beef livestock raising which requires less labor and investment in equipment than dairy husbandry. During the mid-1950's, feed lots in central Washington, particularly the Columbia Basin, began to exert their influence on the cattle numbers in western Washington. Many Skagit County dairy steers, which would have ordinarily been kept on the dairy farms, were shipped to eastern Washington feedlots. This, plus the 1956 drop in Skagit County's clover-timothy production, contributed to the decrease in the county's cattle numbers in 1956 and 1957. Since 1957 there has been a gradual increase in both beef and milk cattle. About 72 percent of the 1962 total number was dairy cattle.

Since 1920 the sale of whole milk from Skagit County dairy farms has greatly increased while the selling of cream and farm butter has markedly decreased. Good market conditions during World War II gave a strong impetus to dairy products. The Census figures for 1944 recorded a peak of 147,128,809 pounds of whole milk being sold from dairy farms. Cream sales reached 90,829 pounds during the same year. Since then, cream sold off the farms has dwindled to 1,125 pounds in 1959. Whole milk sales from farms also declined for a short period after World War II but has been on an upward trend since 1949. Farms reporting sales of whole milk declined over 53 percent--from 1,497 in 1949 to 703 in 1959. Farms which sold cream numbered 37 in 1949 and in 1959 was 5. Dairy specialty farms which numbered 987 in 1950 dropped to 457 in 1959. Increasing costs in recent years have resulted in a trend toward fewer but larger, more efficient dairy operations. Skagit County dairy cattle numbers have been maintained above 30,000 head since 1955, reaching 34,400 in 1962.

Table 29. Dairy Products Sold From Farms
Skagit County, 1949-1959

Year	Any Milk or Cream Sold	Whole Milk Sold	Butterfat in Cream Sold
	Dollars	Pounds	Pounds
1949	\$4,047,900	109,481,720	74,566
1954	4,477,761	118,690,158	15,108
1959	5,550,915	126,125,771	1,125

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Livestock are located mainly in the Samish and Skagit River valley lowlands in the central and western sections of the county. With mountainous terrain and heavy forest, eastern Skagit County has little or no cattle. The heaviest concentration, both dairy and beef animals, is found in the Samish Valley. The Skagit and LaConner Flats between Mount Vernon and Fidalgo Island is the second most important area for dairy and beef cattle. The islands of the county are not heavily stocked with cattle. There is some summer seasonal movement of cattle to the

alpine grasslands on the high mountains flanking the Upper Skagit Valley. Much of the grazing lands in these high mountain lands are located within Mount Baker National Forest and are managed by the federal government.

Poultry Farming

Poultry farming has made steady progress since the decline between 1944 and 1949. Sales of poultry and poultry products from Skagit County farms have increased 29 percent from \$1,219,695 in 1949 to \$1,575,773 in 1959. Chickens sold numbered 153,655 in 1949 compared with 571,349 in 1959. Farms specializing in poultry, however, decreased in number during the decade beginning in 1950 from 145 to 87. The total number of farms which sold chickens and/or eggs also declined during this period. Small farm flocks are rapidly becoming extinct. The current trend is toward large commercial flocks on specialized poultry farms. Among Washington counties, Skagit ranked eighth in the number of chickens sold and was seventh in eggs sold for 1959.

The number of chickens four months and older on farms in Skagit County in 1959 was 269,471, an increase of about 80 percent from the low of 150,016 in 1949. The trend in chicken numbers since 1949 has been gradually upward. Poultrymen utilize both light-weight and heavy-weight breeds. The White Leghorn is favored for egg production, whereas such breeds as Rhode Island Reds, New Hampshire and others are popular as meat production stock.

Table 30. Chickens, Eggs and Turkeys
Skagit County, 1939-1959

Year	Chickens ^{1/} (birds)	Egg Production (dozens)	Turkeys Raised (birds)
1939	216,973	2,477,782	10,491
1944	221,130	2,595,209	23,797
1949	150,016	1,700,793 ^{2/}	19,661
1954	206,022	2,269,492 ^{2/}	3,412
1959	269,471	3,623,908 ^{2/}	111

^{1/} Four months and older. ^{2/} Eggs sold.

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Eggs sold off Skagit County farms in 1959 amounted to 3,623,908 dozen or an increase of 59.7 percent above the 1954 sales. Over 200 farms reported having sold eggs in 1959 compared with nearly 400 in 1954. The current trend is toward large commercial flocks and specialized poultry farms referred to as "egg factories".

In the past, poultry meat was a by-product of egg production. Now it has become an important farm product on its own right. In 1959, 365,500 broilers were sold off 12 Skagit County farms. Other chickens sold numbered 205,849 and were reported by 137 farms.

Skagit County's turkey production is insignificant. Only 111 birds were reported in 1959 by 23 farms. Turkey numbers have steadily declined since a high of 23,797 birds recorded by the Census of Agriculture in 1944.

Sheep

Sheep raising also has been a minor part of Skagit County livestock farming. From the high of 5,453 head in 1930, sheep numbers declined to 1,449 in 1949. By 1959, however, numbers nearly doubled to 2,883. Only three farms reported flocks of over 800 head. More than 1,500 sheep and lambs worth \$19,851 were sold alive in 1959 by Skagit County farmers while 15,626 pounds of wool were shorn from 1,755 sheep.

Table 31. Hogs, Sheep, Horses and Mules
Skagit County, 1939-1959

Year	Hogs (head)	Sheep (head)	Horses and Mules (head)
1939	2,544	1,691	3,068
1944	2,627	1,571	2,401
1949	1,731	1,449	1,467
1954	1,168	2,074	1,005
1959	1,063	2,883	736

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Hogs

Hogs have gradually decreased in Skagit County since 1920. The 1920 Census enumerated 7,382 hogs, pigs and sows on Skagit County farms, whereas in 1959, only 1,063 head were recorded. This reduction in numbers has been a result of changes in farming practices and a shift from general to more specialized farming. Compared with 1920, fewer farmers raise hogs for on-farm slaughter and home use as fresh and cured meats. The commercial raising of hogs and the use of land for grain feed and the diversion of skim milk and other by-products to produce pork has been found less profitable than dairy and beef cattle raising in the county.

The distribution of hogs is characterized by concentrations in areas near the major towns. The heaviest concentration is found in the vicinity around Sedro Woolley.

Horses and Mules

The number of horses and mules in Skagit County has declined greatly since 1920 as the need for work and draft animals decreased in the wake of farm mechanization. Most of the present horses are used for pleasure riding and packing in the forest and mountain recreational areas of the county. In 1920 there were 4,374 horses and mules on farms and in 1959 there were only 736 head.

Table 32. Livestock Sold From Farms
Skagit County, 1959

Livestock Sold	Number of Farms Reporting	Number Sold	Value in Dollars
Cattle	983	9,443	1,753,930
Calves	731	6,755	207,775
Horses and Mules	35	75	32,350
Hogs and Pigs	36	620	20,460
Sheep and Lambs	56	1,527	19,851
Broilers	12	365,500	No data
Chickens (other than broilers)	137	205,849	No data

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1959.